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ABSTRACT

A study examined the skills taught in college reading programs and who teaches them. Questionnaires were returned from 105 colleges and universities across the United States. The data collected were analyzed to show the frequency of response, and the results indicated that (1) reading was taught primarily by persons with master's degrees or higher; (2) classes were open to most students; (3) students were required to attend class from three to ten hours per week; (4) context clues, structural analysis, synonyms, word origins, and antonyms were the most frequently taught word analysis skills; (5) finding the main idea, finding supporting details, making inferences, drawing conclusions, and literal recall were the most frequently taught comprehension skills; (6) test taking, study habits, skimming, using parts of the books, and notetaking were the most frequently taught study skills; and (7) most reading programs relied on textbooks for instructional materials. (HTH)

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COLLEGE READING PROGRAMS OF TODAY: WHO? WHAT? WHERE?

James E. Jackson

Theoretically, college reading programs should be designed to meet the following objective:

> To teach reading and study skills to help each student to help himself do a better job academically by providing him with the skills to master the content of the lectures, to write the research papers, to study for and pass examinations -- all these through helping students become independent studiers. (Pauk, 1968)

Inherent in this objective is the idea that college reading and study skills can be beneficial for the underachiever or unprepared students as well as the average and above average students. However, more often than not, the emphasis in college reading programs is placed on remediating the weakness of the underachiever. This is due partly to declining college age populations resulting in the lowering of admission standards as open enrollment and affirmative action policies continue to attract educationally disadvantaged students (Miller, 1978). Additional rationales for the concentration on the underachiever in the college reading program are multiple and complex.

Programs used to remediate college students' weaknesses are generally one of three types: (1) programs which depend mainly on mechanical devices (computers, etc.); (2) skill drills programs (workbooks); and (3) programs to identify and change behavior patterns responsible for poor reading (study skill and work habits). Many variants will be found among these categories in which for example, drills have been placed on computer discs. Programs may also

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be designed to include all three types of organizational patterns.

The complexity of describing types of organizations found in college reading programs may be matched only by an attempt to describe the content of the college reading program. But one must assume that the nature of the reading process and the skills/strategies relative to the process, coupled with the needs of unprepared college students in general and the specific demands of areas of studies within the universities and colleges will produce many diverse programs with similar staffing, materials, and skills emphasized.

Study

The Purpose, Instrument, and Sampled Population

The purpose of this study was to answer seven basic questions about post-secondary learning institutions.

1. Who teaches in the CRP?
2. How are students selected to attend CRP's?
3. How frequently do they attend per week?
4. What are the five most frequently taught word analysis skills?
5. What are the five most frequently taught comprehension skills?
6. What are the five most frequently taught study skills?
7. What are the most common materials used in CRP's?

A twelve-item questionnaire was designed to ascertain a description of staffing, materials, reading skills, and study skills found in college reading programs.

Items 1-6 of the questionnaire related to the general demographic information relative to each university or college. Items 7-10 pertained to student participation, that is, who can participate and how frequently do they participate? Item 11 was designed to ascertain who teaches the reading classes. Item 12 dealt with kinds of material and skills developed (word analysis, comprehension, and study).

The sampled population for this study included 300 (junior and senior) college and universities in all regions of the continental United States. The colleges and universities were randomly selected from a listing of colleges and universities. Respondents were asked to complete all items on the questionnaire as it applied to the college or university in which he/she was associated. Three hundred questionnaires were mailed; one hundred and twenty-four were returned, of which nineteen were deleted because of incomplete data. Nine percent (9%) were two year institutions. Table 1 shows the distribution of university/college by state.

Table I

N = 124 Participating Institution by State *9% community/junior college

State	Number	State	Number
Alabama	4	Kentucky	8
Arizona	1	Louisiana	3
Arkansas	2	Maryland	1
California	11	Massachusetts	2
Colorado	2	Minnesota	1
Florida	7	Mississippi	4
Georgia	2	Missouri	1
Idaho	5	Nebraska	1
Illinois	2	New Mexico	2
Indiana	3	New York	5
Iowa	2	North Carolina	4
Kansas	2	North Dakota	2

Table 1 (cont.)

State	Number	State	Number
Ohio	4	South Dakota	2
Oklahoma	1	Tennessee	7
Oregon	7	Texas	9
Pennsylvania	8	Utah	1
South Carolina	1	Washington	7

Results and Discussion

The results of the analysis of data showing the frequency of response as shown in Table 2 indicated that from the 105 questionnaires returned, 41% of the persons responsible for teaching colleges students to read had completed the master's degree; 10% had completed a master's degree and had taken additional hours. Thirty-eight percent (38%) had completed the doctorate degree. With respect to how students are selected for the college reading program, 84% of the respondents indicated that their courses were open to all students, and 25% require all freshmen with low entrance admittance scores (see Table 3). When asked how frequently the students are required to attend classes, the responses were 3%, 30 minutes - 1 hour; 59%, 1-3 hours; 27%, 3-10 hours. The remainder of the respondents (11%) had made other arrangements (See Table 4).

Table 2

General Data

Degree held by instructors:	Percentage
Ph.D.	38%
M.A.	41%
M.A.+	10%
Others	11%

Table 3 - Selection of Students

How are students selected?	Percentage
voluntary/referred	84%
required for freshmen with low test scores	25%

Table 4 - Attendance

How frequently do they attend per week?	
30 minutes - 1 hour	3%
1 - 3 hours	59%
3 - 10 hours	27%
other arrangements	11%

The five most frequently taught word analysis skills were context clues (85%), structural analysis (66%), synonym (55%), word origins (45%), and antonyms (33%). (See Table 5.) The five most frequently taught skills associated with comprehension were finding the main idea (88%), finding supporting details (66%), making inferences (79%), drawing conclusions (73%), and literal recall (50%). (See Table 6.) The five most frequently taught study skills were note taking (75%), test taking (81%), study habits (57%), skimming (53%), and parts of the book (47%). (See Table 7.) The most frequently used material was workbooks for reading improvement (60%). (See Table 8.)

Table 5 - Word Analysis

Five most frequently taught word analysis skills	Percentage
contextual analysis	85%
structural analysis	66%
synonym	55%
word origin	45%
antonym	33%

Table 6 - Comprehension Skills

Five most frequently taught comprehension skills	Percentage
finding main idea	88%
making inferences	79%
drawing conclusions	73%
finding supporting details	66%
literal comprehension	50%

Table 7 - Study Skills

Five most frequently taught study skills	
test taking	81%
notetaking	7[illegible]%
study habits	57%
skimming	53%
using the parts of the books	47%

Table 8 - Material Used

Most frequently used for of material	
workbooks for reading improvement	60%

The results of this study suggested that college reading programs are being designed to teach reading and study skills to help students do a better job academically. This is reflected in the skills emphasized and material used by the universities and colleges responding to the questionnaire. The emphasis placed on developing word analysis strategies (85%) in a contextual setting and the utilization of textbooks (60%) in college reading programs presents a pleasing picture of programs which emphasize meaningful learning activities. Furthermore, the use of the textbooks alleviates some of the guesswork in determining whether the skills/strategies taught will transfer to the regular college course work, in that the skills are taught in relevant settings (textbooks).

The rank of the comprehension skills chosen, suggests that there is an emphasis on using the information that students have in their cognitive structure to make prediction, rather than emphasizing the acquisition of sets of rules, diagrams, and facts. This is reflected in the selection of skills such as drawing conclusions and making inferences. While literal comprehension remains the foundation for all other comprehension skills, instructors should note that on many occasions, the literal information is already a part of the students' cognitive structure. Thus relearning information may have little purpose. Within their cognitive structure is knowledge of facts, dates, rules, and principles similar to those that are literally stated in their college texts. Therefore if the students are permitted to use their existing information to draw conclusions and make inferences, instead of having to relearn information, comprehension should increase. Furthermore, the emphasis on making inferences and drawing conclusions should increase the students rate of reading, due to the fact that such actions reduces the amount of information they must process.

Similar relevant activities are most frequently stressed pertaining to study skill. Over 75% of the respondents stated that they taught test taking and notetaking skill more often than any other form of study skills.

Notetaking and test taking are key factors in organizing and exemplifying knowledge of information presented. The extent to which students can note important information in a lecture or from print, could very well determine their college success. The need for effective test taking

strategies permeates the entire college curriculum. If success in college is determined by students' ability to show knowledge gain as a consequence of instruction, directly or indirectly, failure to respond appropriately is certain to signify failure. In some cases failure not because the student did not know the information but because he/she did not understand the questions or did not allocate needed time for each question or simply did not read the directions properly. In either case, proper test taking procedures would be helpful.

In conclusion, colleges and universities sampled are taught primarily by persons with master's degrees or higher degrees. Classes are open to most students and require that they spend 3 - 10 hours per week developing skills needed to help college students acquire, use, and exemplify information so as to be successful in regular college courses.

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